

## Performance Practice Review

---

Volume 15 | Number 1

Article 2

---

# "The Sounds and Sights of Performance in Early Music: Essays in Honour of Timothy J. McGee" by Maureen Epp and Brian E. Power

Roland Jackson

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr>



Part of the [Music Practice Commons](#)

---

Jackson, Roland (2010) ""The Sounds and Sights of Performance in Early Music: Essays in Honour of Timothy J. McGee" by Maureen Epp and Brian E. Power," *Performance Practice Review*: Vol. 15: No. 1, Article 2. DOI: 10.5642/perfpr.201015.01.02  
Available at: <http://scholarship.claremont.edu/ppr/vol15/iss1/2>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Claremont at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in Performance Practice Review by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact [scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu](mailto:scholarship@cuc.claremont.edu).

**Book review: Epp, Maureen, Brian E. Power, eds. *The Sounds and Sights of Performance in Early Music: Essays in Honour of Timothy J. McGee*. Surrey (UK) and Burlington (VT): Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009. ISBN 978-0-7546-5483-4.**

**Roland Jackson**

Copyright © 2010 Claremont Graduate University

---

Timothy J. McGee, to whom this *Festschrift* is dedicated, is well deserving of musicological honor. He is an exemplary figure in Medieval and Renaissance performance practice, and has made valuable contributions as well in a number of other areas. McGee acknowledges that final solutions are never entirely achievable in the performance of past music—a line frequently heard from dissenters of the field—but he has nonetheless forged ahead, exploring particularly the treatises and the music itself for clues that bring us closer to how compositions originally sounded.

Sixty-three entries by McGee are listed in an appendix, including books, editions, articles, and chapters in books by others. Many of these have reshaped our thinking concerning early music. Especially valuable is his monumental *The Sound of Medieval Song: Ornamentation and Vocal Style according to the Treatises* (1998), a volume that has allowed us to rethink the performance of chant in the Middle Ages, dividing its realization into the earlier (ninth- to eleventh-century) neume-based sources, with their numerous ornaments and vocal inflections, rhythmic contrasts, and fluctuating tempo, and the later ones (from the twelfth to thirteenth century) with their square notation, attended by even rhythms, smooth delivery, steady tempo, and a minimal use of ornaments. Another landmark study is his *The Pronunciation of European Languages in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance* (1996), co-edited by A. G. Rigg and David Klausner (showing McGee's commendable willingness to collaborate with scholars in related fields), a volume that allows early music performers, e.g. of Machaut, Josquin, Lasso, or Byrd, to render their works and those of other composers, using the original sounds of the words, something that imparts a special closeness to the music's original effect (witness the recent performances of Machaut by the group Diabolus in Musica).

Also evident in the list is McGee's attention to minute aspects of earlier music, such as the performance of fermatas in fifteenth-century pieces in his article "Singing without Text," where he shows that improvised diminutions sometimes replaced the elongation of notes. Another interesting detailed study concerns the identification of the instruments used in the *canti*

*carnascialeschi* of late fifteenth-century Florence through the locating of references to them and their manner of performance in the texts of these pieces, e.g. the trombonist's articulation with his tongue, the shawmist's wetting of his reed.

McGee, then, has laid out an admirable path for other scholars to follow, and important examples by his colleagues, students, and friends appear in the present volume. Three studies (by Barbara Sparti, Jennifer Nevile, and Randall Rosenfeld), inspired by McGee's basic book *Medieval Instrumental Dance*, explore various aspects of this genre. Sparti, writing on the galliard, examines the question of coordinating actual dance steps with their musical realizations in various editions. Rosenfeld reveals possible Middle Eastern influences on certain late fourteenth-century dances, and Nevile emphasizes the role of women in fifteenth-century ceremonies. Two studies (by Keith Polk and John Haines), following the lead of McGee's "Instruments and the Faenza Codex," pursue questions dealing with the use of soft instruments in Renaissance and Medieval music. Polk adds further evidence to the surmise that the players of such instruments (e.g. Cordier) were able to perform polyphony as well as monophony, and Haines shows iconographically that fiddle players of the thirteenth century were already able to read musical notation. Four studies (by Andrew Hughes, Maureen Epp, Brian E. Power, and Honey Meconi), influenced by McGee's estimable manuscript explorations, concentrate on various details found in manuscripts. Hughes emphasizes the value of computer comparisons in arriving at a preferable version of a chant. Epp uncovers the presence of repeat signs in fifteenth-century music. Power throws light on the meanings of *chorus*, *duo*, and *fauxbourdon* in early fifteenth-century manuscripts, and Meconi demonstrates that certain early sixteenth-century pieces were performed with varying numbers of voices and sometimes made use of added decorations.

In other studies, Robert Toft applies Vicentino's performance criteria (dynamic and tempo changes in regard to certain text words) to a Monteverdi madrigal. Leslie Korrick, an art historian, shows how Vincenzo Galilei adapted the ideas of contemporary painters to musical tuning, suggesting that vocal pitch, like instrumental, could have been governed by tempered tuning. And Jennifer Bain questions whether recent recordings of Hildegard of Bingen (by Gothic Voices and Sequentia) accurately reflect the performance of her original time, which was presumably far less virtuosic in quality.

In sum, this is a volume full of commendable insights and new information concerning Medieval and Renaissance performance, one that constitutes a fitting tribute to the many worthwhile musicological endeavors of Timothy J. McGee.